DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 373 PS 015 998

AUTHOR Palmer, Colin R.
TITLE Technological Changes and the Adolescent.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 8p.; In "Preparation for Adulthood. Third Asian Workshop on Child and Adolescent Development"; see PS 015 978.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Developed Nations; Foreign Countries; Secondary Education; *Student Behavior; *Technological Advancement; *Television Viewing; *Video Equipment; *Videotape Cassettes
IDENTIFIERS Postman (Neil); *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Although teaching continues to be a predominantly oral tradition, supplement of resources, such as films and television are widely used as teaching aids. An exponential growth exists in market exports of television equipment and in the expenditure on television and video equipment in the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK it is probably true that children have to be at school till they are 11 years old before they become exposed to their teacher as much as to television. As video-cassette recorder sales increase, this condition will be exacerbated. Postman (1983) may be correct in arguing that childhood is disappearing, because it is no longer necessary for children to learn to read, write, and calculate when they can easily use sophisticated electronic equipment. Because of the availablity of video-cassette recorders the impact of television on a possibly disappearing childhood takes on an added twist; youth in Glasgow, Scotland, for example, tend to watch pirated copies of films they would not be permitted to watch in the cinema. Certainly, though, youth in the future will still have to gain knowledge, values, beliefs, and skills. That will take time, and that time will still be childhood. Of course, what teachers do may change, and the means by which they do it may change radically. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Technological Changes and the Adolescent

ED273373

PS 015998

Colin R. Palmer

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Chiam Heng Keng

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A little over a hundred years ago, the vast majority of parents were bewildered by what their children were doing in school. They had little or no perception of what school meant for they themselves had no experience of it. This was not the case with the teachers. Although the new mass education was an exciting and then modern experiment, the tasks and activities of the teachers were familiar and had a long history reaching back many hundreds of years. For the past fifty or so years, stability has been the key word for both parent and teacher alike. Yes, there have been changes: new subjects have been introduced and others discarded or modified; entrance selectivity to the secondary level has been removed to a large extent; we have become more child-centred than teacher-centred. However, to the outsider looking in on the system as a whole, the activities of the teacher and the pupil have remained almost untouched. The teacher is still the focus of the classroom. Teaching remains in the oral tradition (it is less than ten years ago that a Professor of English Literature told me that he still had to find a use for the chalkboard in his teaching). The teacher is still the fount of all knowledge and wisdom and other resources (books, films, television, slides ... whatever) are supplements. Indeed, the language we use reinforces their role: we speak of *audio visual AIDS*.

However, times are changing and changing rapidly. Consider briefly some statistics. Figure 1 shows the growth in market exports of equipment concerned with generating TV images. Its exponential nature cannot be denied. The same trend is seen in the expenditure (Figure 2) on television and video equipment in the United Kingdom (UN., 1983).

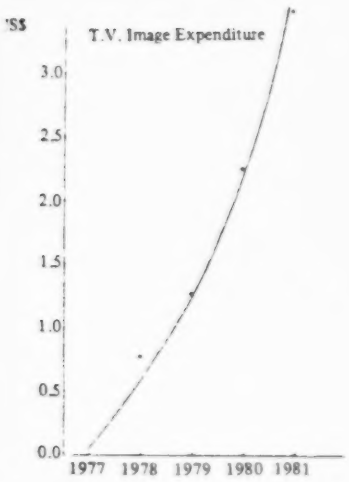

Figure 1: TV Image Expenditure

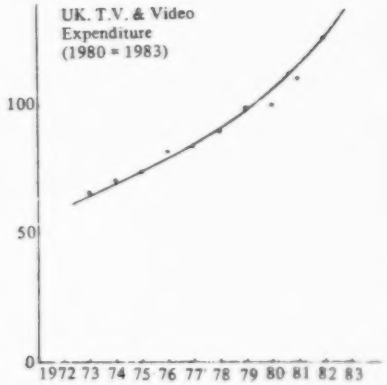

Figure 2: UK T.V. and Video Expenditure

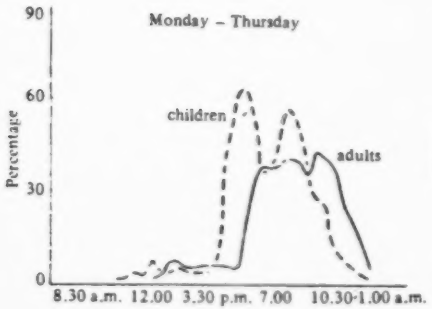

Figure 3: Viewing Patterns from Monday to Thursday

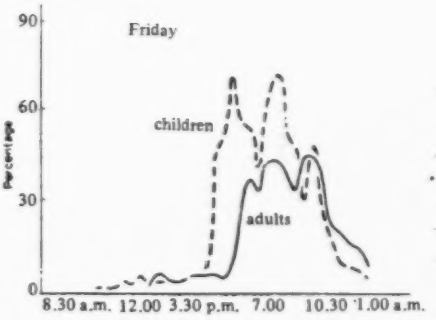

Figure 4: Viewing Patterns on Friday

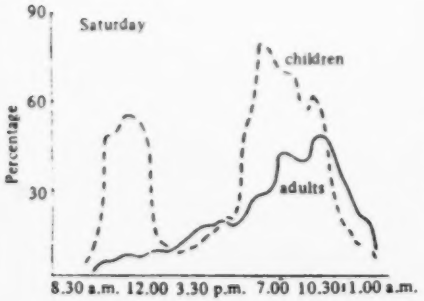

Figure 5: Viewing Patterns on Saturday

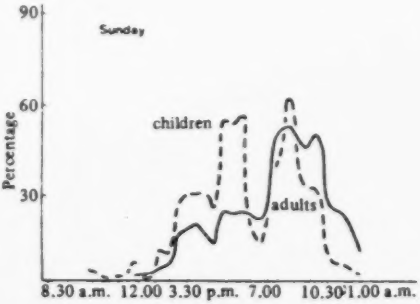

Figure 6: Viewing Patterns on Sunday

What are the viewing patterns? The latest available figures for the United Kingdom are shown in Figures 3–6 (HMSO, 1983).

These figures reveal the following:

(1) Adults: Watching television between Monday and Friday has little variation. The sharp rise that occurs each day coincides with the end of the working day and the onset of post evening meal activities. In comparison, notice the early morning surge of children's viewing and the steady drift on Saturdays reflecting the greater adult audience availability and possibly the transmission of sporting events in the afternoon.

(2) Children: The apparent bimodol distribution on weekdays can be interpreted as a break for evening meal after an initial peak immediately following the end of school. Perhaps young children going to bed in the early evening accounts for the slight drop in audience after this break. The distinct trough on Saturdays reflects the change from morning 'children's' transmissions to afternoon sports transmissions. Roughly 60/70% capture is obtained during peak 'children's hours' and a significant proportion of children are watching television after 9.00 p ... the time at which 'adult' programming begins in earnest.

When children watch is one question and how much they watch is another. There is a well-worn American statistic that children have to be at school till they are eleven years old before they become exposed to their teacher as much as they are exposed to television. There is no reason to doubt that the same is true of the United Kingdom but would add that this will be exacerbated as video-cassette recorder sales increase.

We now approach the idea of viewing materials from a different perspective – that of Postman (1983) and his idea of the disappearing childhood. The substance of Postman's idea is simple. Childhood, as it is presently understood, is a recent innovation and one that has passed its time, primarily as a result of the impact of television. One way of analysing the concept of childhood is to examine its defining attributes for if it is disappearing, these attributes will be changing. Let us look at a few of these, comparing the life-styles of adults and children and their dresses, tasks and leisure activities. Early medieval pictures give us some idea of medieval life-styles. The clothes, tasks, the leisure activities are graphically illustrated in Bruegel's paintings. In these, children are dressed identically with their parents: they are simply smaller. The same is seen to be true well into the following centuries. Gainborough's family portraits imply a similar observation. At first glance, it is difficult to distinguish between adults and children unless relative sizes are apparent. In the 1900s, changes do appear and children's clothes are distinct from adult's clothes.

What of leisure activities? Again artists give the same message, and again a change is seen in the more recent years.

What about work? The message is repeated. Within the limits of their physical capabilities, medieval children are treated as MINI-ADULTS. On a map on the wall of my home, the cartographer Bowen in 1749 comments on the inhabitants of Norwich '... in the making of which all hands are employed and even little children can earn their living'.

In this context of children as mini-adults, the employment of children in the cotton mills and coal mines of England at the time of the industrial revolution might be understandable, if not excusable.

What happened in the 1900s that suddenly changed all this? Simply, the industrial revolution produced the need for people who could read, write and do arithmetic (the so-called three Rs). These abilities are not what Postman calls biological skills. They have to be acquired and that acquisition is a formal activity requiring time. Childhood thus becomes the time it takes to generate the skills required to become an adult. (Postman argues that this process of breaking with biological skills began with the development of the Guttenburg press when reading became a significant skill for advancement.)

So why is childhood disappearing? Simply, says Postman, the necessity for an individual to have learned these skills is being removed: biological skills are becoming all that is necessary. How? Perhaps the best way of answering this question is by asking 'questions'. Why should we spend hours drilling children with multiplication tables, additions and subtractions and divisions when pocket calculators can do the job more effectively and more accurately? The only reason for chanting twelve times tables throughout my early years was the quaint currency then in use in the United Kingdom. There were twelve pennies in one shilling! Why should we concentrate on the manipulative skills of writing when the microprocessor/word processor makes even my handwriting legible? Why learn to read when we can listen and watch? All that is needed is to talk and for that we need the voice, and this can be done over vast distances by telephone and networked microprocessors. Thus, says Postman, the necessity for an extended childhood is disappearing.

Is there any evidence to support this notion? Certainly there is in terms of equipment provison. A total of 80% of homes in the United Kingdom possess an audio-cassette recorder and 1 in 11 homes possess a microprocessor. My children have more computing power at their fingertips than myself when I was a student undertaking doctoral research in chemistry! The British Broadcasting Corporation regularly transmits software in the quiet hours of transmission. British Telecom offers a similar service.

Table 1 shows how the video-cassette recorder industry is growing in Western Europe and, in particular, in the United Kingdom (Whitten, 1983). By 1985, 1 in 2 homes within the United Kingdom are expected to possess a video-tape recorder. However, why single out television? It is

not only the amount that is being watched but this linked with what is being watched – the images that it portrays. Quietly, childhood is being squeezed downwards by adulthood. Consider those 'housewives' and their 'children' advertising soap, breakfast cereals, holidays and the like.

Table 1
Video Cassette Recorders in Homes (in Percentages)

Country	1982	1983	1984	1985
Italy	1	2		
France	3	4		
Benelux	7	10		
Scandinavia	10	13		
West Germany	11	15		
Rest of Western Europe	4	6		
United Kingdom	16	22		50 (?)
Total	7	10	18 (?)	

The generation gap certainly seems to have shrunk! It is submitted that a not small proportion of these mothers would seem to have given birth to their child at an age when this was biologically impossible! The edges of the generation gap are being blurred and this is also seen elsewhere. Children's clothing is reverting back to smaller editions of their parent's clothing and the pressures are also on the parents for their clothing is being styled in the image of perpetual youth. If we look at the type of films that are produced, childhood again is seen to be under pressure. The proportion of films deemed by the censor in the United Kingdom as being fit for unaccompanied children has been steadily declining (see Figure 7). However, the number of adult films has remained steady and if one reflects upon what is now considered to be an adult film, then the middle category – perhaps more accurately described as adolescent and late adolescent films – takes in a slightly different perspective. Add this observation to the fact that a significant use of video-cassette recorders is for the replaying of films in the home, then the impact of television on a disappearing childhood takes on an added twist.

A recent but admittedly limited study of the impact on school children of video viewing in the home was undertaken by some Glasgow school teachers. In short, they made the following observations.

(1) The native Glaswegian adolescent watches about 3/4 hours video nightly, more at weekends. They tend to watch either alone or in peer groups without adults being present. The tapes tend to be pirate copies of films that they would not be permitted to watch in a

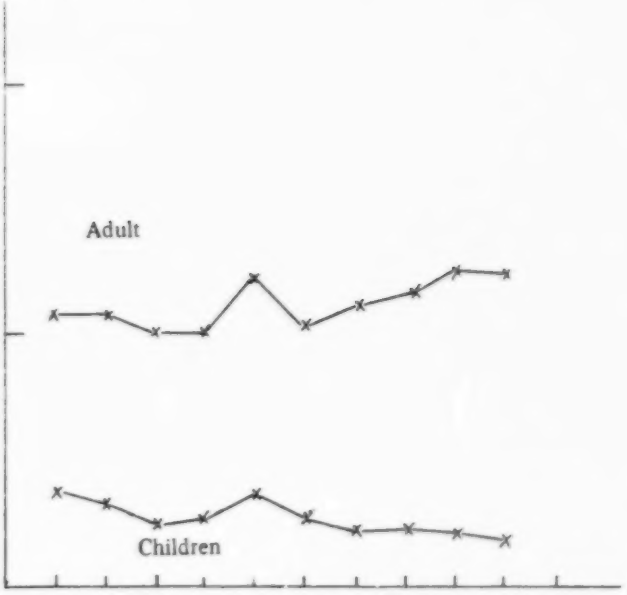

Figure 7: Feature Film Certificates

Source: *Social Trends 12,* London, HMSO, 1982.

cinema. The girls tend to watch 'love' stories while the boys 'violent' and 'blue' movies.

(2) Children of immigrant families tend to watch as families in the presence of their parents. They do not watch quite as much as their native peers but they do tend to watch later in the night, usually after the family business has closed. The recordings they watch come from video libraries and are of ethnic origin. The children of Chinese parents tend to watch Chinese films in which the language is Chinese. The children of Indian parentage tend to watch Indian films in Hindi. Rarely are English sub-titles seen. Understandable though this is, it presents a potential nightmare for the school teacher when a recent observation made known to me of an inner city school in which pupils spoke eighty different mother tongues is thought of.

Here are some of the concerns that face the teacher as technology moves forward and as said earlier on, times are changing and changing rapidly. But are they? Is childhood really disappearing? Or is it simply that we have to do different things during that time and make different use of our teachers? Teachers are no different from anybody else. They too are children of their own generation, may be a frightened generation when

you compare the effects of a microprocessor or video-cassette recorder on a teacher with the effects they have on a child. The present teacher thinks in terms of audio-visual aids. The future teacher may well be regarded as a learning manager. However, the child will still have to gain knowledge, values, beliefs and skills. The nature of these may well change but their acquisition will still take time and that time will still be childhood. Personally, it is neither believed childhood is disappearing nor that its role is changing. However, it is recognised that what we do during this time may well change and the means by which we do it may change even more radically. A dark age is not seen ahead of us. What is seen is an exciting and challenging period in which the teachers' role remains what it always has been – preparing the next generation for adulthood by using the best and most effective means at their disposal.

REFERENCES

HMSO, *Social Trends 12*, London, HMSO, 1982.
HMSO, *Social Trends 13*, London, HMSO, 1983.
Postman, N, *The disappearance of childhood*, London, Allen, 1983.
United Nations, *1981 Yearbook of International Trade Statistics*, United Nations, 1983.
Whitten, P., 'Predicting a video cassette future', *Televisual*, December, 1983, p. 54.